

# NOTES FROM THE:

## Professional Military Comptroller School

by Lt Col Terry L. Ross

In the fertile farmland along the banks of the Mississippi River in Southern Missouri, a young seven year old boy, dripping wet from head to toe, strained on his toes to no avail to see over the five foot tall cotton, still wet from the morning dew. He carried a potato sack to which his mother had sewn a cloth shoulder strap to improvise for picking cotton. The youngster was left to pick-off the ends of the rows of cotton while the adults would cut a swath from one end of the field to the other picking, singing, and talking as they went about their hot and arduous task. Even though he didn't enjoy being wet in the early morning, he knew the heat of the day would come all too soon. It was a small price to pay to stay in the shade cast off from the trees at the end of the cotton field. Many a summer has passed since these early carefree memories. Time marched on, the automated cotton pickers did away with manual workers and even the Cotton Carnivals that came along to ease the burden of cash in our pockets disappeared in time. Needless to say life's early experiences leave a lasting impression on us as we move on.

When I was given an opportunity to write my final article for the school before I venture off to Air War College this summer, I gladly accepted. Now many of my former students are thinking I have violated the first rule of the PMCS writing program by using first person. I received a temporary waiver to the rule so I could make this a personal plea to place professional and personal development high on your priority list. I don't just mean for your own personal growth, but your subordinates as well. When I started thinking about what I should pen, this early experience came to mind and reminded me how suddenly changes come and how quickly time passes. The past two years as a member of the PMCS faculty have passed quickly. I have been in the perfect position to assess the talents and strengths of our DoD financial managers. Although my observations don't reveal anything new or cosmic, they have renewed afresh some *old truths*. First, it became clear to me the development of *vision* is the key to success. It is relatively easy to distinguish between individuals who can focus on the *big picture* and those who continue to struggle to see over

the tall cotton. The second *truth* is we must be flexible. I have seen a number of students who make the transitions with comparative ease while their counterparts find it uncomfortable or impossible to handle changes. Like the changes that vanquished the cotton fields of my childhood, changes will continue to roll toward us. Those who can adapt survive. PMCS provides each of our students with an excellent opportunity to show how they can handle the various learning opportunities. My final observation is a resounding endorsement of the course for our financial managers and the excellent opportunity presented to those who become PMCS faculty members. Having now had the opportunity to do both, I can honestly say I am a better financial manager. Let me talk to you just a few moments on each of these *truths*.

I mentioned earlier *vision* as an essential area for growth. The American Heritage Dictionary defines vision as; *unusual competence in discernment or perception; intelligent foresight*. There are several key words in this definition. The phrase *unusual competence* tells us those possessing this attribute of vision are unique and generally in small supply. Competence implies this quality was not just a genetic fluke, but considerable effort to gain proficiency and experience must be exerted by the future visionary. *Big Picture* courses such as PMCS offer an excellent opportunity for both students and faculty members to expand their field of vision. Breadth of vision is just as important as depth. The 7 year old *cotton picker* later grew to be a 6 foot 5 inch tall *basketball player*. Seeing over the cotton wasn't a problem, but the basketball coaches spent a lot of energy developing my peripheral vision. Being able to see plays developing in the half court was equally as important as seeing down the court. This ability separated both Magic Johnson and Larry Bird from the *just great* players. The need for *intelligent foresight* is not obvious to many folks in their day to day job, but those who recognize the benefits soon rise to the top. Stay on top of contemporary issues, tech-

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the globe with assets as far away as 20,000 miles into space. Her discussion on the Space Commission, chaired by the Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld (now SecDef), described how Space has become a top national security priority. In addition, she discussed how administration of Space must meet the National Security Space needs of the 21st century, and how DoD must use Space assets as a medium in conflict. Space, the *Financial Frontier*, will expand FM roles and responsibilities for those who cost the equipment to those who budget and account for the billions of dollars the program will require over the next decade. The opportunities are as unlimited as space itself for the professional FSO and DFAS members attending the luncheon.

While each of our speakers brought a different perspective of Financial Management to the audience, a central theme ran through each presentation. The need for partnering, for working together, is critical to the success of our FSO professionals and accomplishment of their mission. This year's conference brought together 250 professionals who had a chance to increase their professional expertise as well as make professional relationships with today's FSOs and tomorrow's FM leaders. For more information, on the conference and FM professional development, visit the SAF/FM web site.



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nology, industry practices, Congressional actions, and any news impacting your Service. Prepare to be a visionary.

Being a visionary will only get you part of the way home. If you are unable or incapable of reacting in the appropriate fashion to the changes you foresee, the vision will only afford you the opportunity to see the freight train before it hits you. Not a pleasant thought. Cotton farmers saw a way to cut costs and improve their yield by using machines to harvest their crops. Further innovation led to shorter hybrids of cotton making machine harvesting easier and even more efficient. Thankfully, *cotton pickers* such as myself were put out of business. As I observed PMCS students adapt to schedule changes, an academic environment, other students, and multiple projects I could only image how effective they would be back in their normal work environment. Maybe familiarity with issues at the home station even enhances their performance, but the new environment certainly shows stress fractures quickly for some. Although a lot of the academic environment is artificial it makes a great laboratory for self-assessment and improvement. When you approach PMCS or any other professional growth challenge see them as an opportunity to stretch yourself and become more flexible and multi-dimensional as a financial manager.

The first step is to seek opportunities. You are ultimately responsibility for your own professional growth. While you're setting your personal goals make PMCS attendance a high priority. The school is supported by an excellent and experienced staff and supplemented by 65 to 70 outstanding guest lectures from across DoD. If you don't learn something you're not trying. Additionally, if you have the opportunity to become a PMCS instructor, jump at it! After hearing 312 student briefings and numerous guest lectures, and reading over 140 student papers my well of knowledge and information was filled many times over. It has been truly a fun, creative, learning, and rewarding experience.

I hope sharing my observations from the past two years might in some way inspire you to continue to seek self-improvement. Develop a personal and professional vision to the future. Remember this will require you to stretch and be flexible with your changing environment. I know six weeks is a long time to be away at a course, but attendance at PMCS will add a new dimension to your professional growth and will be well worth your efforts. Most importantly don't forget to share your knowledge and experience with others. We all occasionally find ourselves back in the *tall cotton*, but hopefully your preparations will help you find your way



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## Financial Management Career Program (Continued From Page 29)

for the new Financial Management Certifications are FM1, FM2, and FM3 for the three respective certification levels. No Total Person Score points are associated with the certification levels. However, supervisors are strongly encouraged to take Financial Management Level certifications as an indication of a person's professionalism and initiative. Consideration will be given to certification levels when making selections for promotions and other personnel actions.

